

HISTOIRE DES COLLECTIONS NUMISMATIQUES ET DES INSTITUTIONS VOUÉES À LA NUMISMATIQUE

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THE COIN CABINET OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VALÈNCIA (SPAIN)

The History

The University of València, founded on 1501 by a papal bull of Pope Alexander VI, was affected from its beginnings by curiosity for ancient coinages, and its scholars felt attracted by the wide thematic horizons that they cover. The origins of the coin cabinet of the University of València are unknown. All those who have been interested in tracing its evolution have never been able to go back beyond the second half of the XVIII century¹. At that time Valencia had, at least, one institutional collection of coins, since in 1767 a collection kept in the Public Library of Valencia was known, but according to Perez de Sarrió in 1799 it was no longer there, and he suggested the possibility that it had been transferred to the University, to establish or increase its collection.

The studies of Francisco Pérez Bayer (1711–1794), professor of Hebrew Language (1745), had very positive consequences for the University of València. In 1785, he donated his library to the University², containing more than 20,000 volumes³. Pérez Bayer may also have donated his own coin cabinet, for we know that he collected coins⁴, although we know neither its content nor size.

- 1 F. Mateu y Llopis, *Ampurias* VII–VIII, 1944–1945, pp. 236–237; F. Mateu y Llopis, “La tradición numaria de Valencia y la creación del Laboratorio de Arqueología de su Universidad”, *Papeles del Laboratorio de Arqueología de Valencia* 11, 1975, pp. 41–73; F. M^a. Garín, *La Universidad Literaria de Valencia y sus obras de arte*, Valencia, 1982, pp. 57–63; R. Arroyo, *Numario de la Universidad de Valencia*, Valencia, 1984, pp. 19–23. M^a. Cruz Cabeza, “La Biblioteca Universitaria de Valencia”, *Boletín de la Asociación española de archiveros, bibliotecarios, museólogos y documentalistas* XLVI, 1996, pp. 293–318. P.P Ripollès, “La colección numismática”, *Los tesoros de la University of València*, Valencia 1999, pp. 137–150. V. L. Galbis y Giner, “El legado numismático de la University of València: una suma de pasiones”, *Saitabi* 58, 2008, pp. 27–59.
- 2 F. Almela y Vives, “Origen de la Biblioteca Universit ria de Val ncia”, *Revista de Catalunya* 41, nov. 1927, p. 486.
- 3 F. Almela y Vives, *op. cit.*, p. 492. Gutierrez del Ca o, t. II, p. 28, n  1773, n  126–128, p. 175, n  486, seg n R. Arroyo, *op. cit.*
- 4 F. Almela y Vives, *op. cit.*, pp. 483–484, relating to P rez Bayer’s attempt at a coin exchange with the Marquis Escipion Maffei and his intention of buying coins, among other objects, during his travel to Andalusia and Portugal.

Years passed without record of the coin cabinet until 1806, when in the course of works made in the Sanctuary of Sant Miquel de Lliria, on October 31st, an important hoard of Roman Republican denarii (the oldest specimen minted in 209 B.C. and the latest in 44 B.C.) was discovered. Acquired by Francisco X. Borrull, who bequeathed it to the University fully inventoried (manuscript 190); it contained 982 pieces, which constituted the greatest acquisition of Roman Republican coinages by the University.

We do not know the consequences of the events of the War of Independence (1808–1814) on the coin cabinet, although it is known that coins have a higher risk of being lost or dispersed during times of political instability. We know nothing about the consequences that the French bombing (7 January 1812) had on the coin collection, but we do know the library was burned and a large part of the books donated by Pérez Bayer disappeared.

We have no evidence until 1834 that the coin collection had been inventoried, although the preliminary work had dubious value for the correct organization of the coin cabinet (Biblioteca Universitaria, Papeles de Numario). A few years later, gifts from several collectors followed one another; outstanding among them is the one made by J. Narciso Aparici, who bequeathed to the University books, rings, cameos and medals⁵. Of this donation only the rings and the cameos have been identified; however, it is almost certain that the bequest also included coins, because the word “medals”, referred to coins at this time.

In the middle of the XIX century, towards 1852, a Real Orden stipulated that Basilio Sebastián Castellanos de Losada, curator of the Cabinet of Medals of the Royal Library (Madrid) and later of the Numismatic section of the National Archaeological Museum (Madrid)⁶, had to classify and arrange the coin cabinet of the University of València. He was, in addition, the founder of the *Sociedad Numismática Matritense* (1837). We know that a wooden coin cabinet with trays was manufactured in which the pieces were lodged. This suggests that previously they could not have been conveniently stored. New inventories were made, one in which the coins were listed by storage location and another one in which the pieces were catalogued in more detail.

We do not know how the coin cabinet was organized after the intervention of Basilio Sebastián Castellanos de Losada, but about thirty years later (1886), when Vicente Chirivella was the curator, he received a visit from the distinguished scholar Mr. Arthur Engel, who after his examination noted that it needed a complete rearrangement. He indicated the existence of a large

5 C. Alfaro, *Entalles y camafeos de la University of València*, Estudis Numismàtics Valencians 7, Valencia 1996.

6 G. Mora, “Rafael Cervera y el coleccionismo numismático en España en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX”, *Numisma* 239, 1997, p. 192.

number of forgeries, that many Islamic coinages were un-catalogued and regretted not having been able to see all the coin collection, because the coinages of the Christian Kingdoms were packed and not classified. In spite of the bad impression that the state of the collection produced, he identified some interesting items, still in trays, such as the aureus of Domitian, that of Plautilla and the octadrachm of Ptolemy V Epiphanes⁷.

The coin cabinet of the University, however organized, was considered one of the most important collections in Spain and as such appeared in the *Guida Numismatica Universale*, published by E. Gneccchi, where he included a brief summary of the monetary periods represented. Just a short time later, E. Babelon mentioned the coin cabinet again in his well-known book on the Greek and Roman coinages, *Traité des monnaies grecques...*⁸

The arrival of Luis Gonzalvo París at the University altered the life and the integrity of the collection in a significant way. Gonzalvo gained the chair of Archaeology, Numismatics and Epigraphy; disciplines which were obligatory in the curricula. Since Gonzalvo was a student of F. Codera, it can be assumed that he was essentially an Arabist which he was, because, according to F. Mateu y Llopis, their lectures included the Islamic coinages of the Emirate and the Caliphate. The most significant fact for the coin cabinet was the removal from the core collection, at an uncertain date, of a numerous group of coins (1881 pieces) that were kept in Archaeology, Numismatics and Epigraphy for easy access, a place where they are still kept safe for teaching purposes.

This group of coins which was deposited in the safekeeping of professor Gonzalvo París was not properly inventoried; and its original content is unknown. From the present composition we know that it was composed of an extensive representation of pieces of all periods, although the Roman, Iberian and the Islamic coinages were outstanding.

About 1920–1921, F. Mateu y Llopis was a student of this University and later related that he undertook the cataloguing of the Roman coinages of the collection kept by Gonzalvo París. He produced 148 graphite imprints of coins with their descriptions, which he published in a collective book printed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Laboratory of Archaeology⁹. The graphical testimony that he published is interesting since some of these coins no longer exist.

7 A. Engel, “Notes sur les Collections Numismatiques de l’Espagne”, *Bulletin Archeologique* VI, 1886–1890, según F. Mateu y Llopis, *op. cit.* pp. 50–51.

8 E. Babelon, *Traité des monnaies grecques et romaines*, Paris, 1901–1932.

9 F. Mateu y Llopis, “La tradición numaria de Valencia y la creación del Laboratorio de Arqueología de su Universidad”, *Papeles del Laboratorio de Arqueología de Valencia* 11, 1975, pp. 41–73.

At the request of a group of students of the University for a place in which to meet and have practicals on archaeological materials, L. Gonzalvo created the Laboratory of Archaeology (1924), where the departmental coin collection was transferred, to a room located in the very University. Mateu tells that the coins were properly organized, but we do not know how they were kept and lodged, because no furniture has survived.

Little can be said of the consequences that the Spanish Civil War had on the coins of the University, both those preserved in the Library, and those kept in the Laboratory of Archaeology, because we have never seen a catalogue that allowed us to make an evaluation of possible losses. In those years, the director of the Library, Rafael Raga y Miñana, entrusted Pío Beltrán and Mateu y Llopis (then in charge of the Archivo del Reino, Valencia) to review and organize the coin collection in order to improve its safekeeping.

After the Spanish Civil War, the University collection was the only important public collection in Valencia. According to Mateu y Llopis, around 1943–1944, conversations were held with the rector of the University, Dr. Fernando Rodríguez Fornos, to enhance it and to create the Coin Cabinet of the University as an independent institution. But the idea did not come to fruition.

During the 1940's a new catalogue of the coins kept in the Laboratory was attempted. This time Reyes Carbonell was in charge, but his work remained unfinished¹⁰.

During this time, from the period of the Civil War until 1964, the coins remained in metallic boxes. At this date the Librarian, Pilar Gómez, took charge of the coins.

R. Arroyo made the necessary rearrangement of the Library coin collection, through the intervention of Prof. A. Ubieto. The coins were placed in their corresponding trays, ordered by periods. From these years, the contents of both collections have provided material for several research studies. In 1978, J. Juan Grau studied the Iberian and Celtiberian coinages for her degree thesis¹¹; in 1980, V. Falomir presented a study of Republican, Iberian and Roman provincial coinages kept in the Departament de Prehistòria i d'Arqueologia, fruit of the cataloguing engendered by Prof. M. Almagro-Gorbea. Shortly after, R. Arroyo catalogued and studied the old coins of the Library collection, presenting this to obtain his PhD¹². S. Asíns studied the

10 E. Gallent, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

11 J. Juan Grau, *Las monedas hispánicas de la Biblioteca Universitaria de Valencia*, Memoria de Licenciatura, Valencia, 1978, unpublished.

12 R. Arroyo, *Numario de la Universidad de Valencia*, Valencia, 1984.

late imperial coinages¹³. In 1999–2000, on the occasion of the 5th Centenary of the foundation of the University of Valencia and within the Thesaurus Project, Dr. M. Gozalbes and A. Collado digitized and catalogued the entire collection, making this the most complete inventory.

The content of the coin cabinet

The numismatic collection of the University contains at the present time more than 11,000 coins, well balanced between the diverse historical periods.

The section of Greek currency is small, as also was its circulation in Antiquity in the Iberian area. It mainly consists of bronze coins. The mints are varied and were located throughout the Greek world. Among them the predominance of the Carthaginian issues struck during the Second Punic War should be noted. Although the group of Greek pieces cannot be considered excellent, among them there is an exceptional octadrachm minted by Ptolemy V Epiphanes (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Octadrachm. Ptolemy V Epiphanes, 204–181 B.C.

The core of the collection consists of Roman coins with several thousand pieces. The Republican specimens are represented mainly by denarii, because, in the last century, the Lliria hoard that contained 982 pieces entered the University collection (fig. 2). It was the purse of a Roman soldier from the army of Julius Caesar, and the find provided a substantial amount of pieces

13 S. Asíns Velis, *Numario de Valencia II: De Diocletianus a Honorius*, Memoria de Licenciatura, Valencia, 1986, unpublished.

issued during the 1st century BC. Among them, those pieces minted by this general stand out. As a whole, the coins are well preserved and allow us to follow with detail the evolution of the iconography and family names of the *tresviri* that struck them.



Fig. 2. Roman Republican Denarius (serratus). Rome. 106 B.C.

The issues of the Roman Imperial period are more numerous than those of the Republic. The different metals that were coined are all represented: gold, silver and aes (bronze, orichalcum and copper), although there is great predominance of bronze specimens, many of which show a high degree of wear. This remarkable number of coins allows us to have a detailed coverage of Roman Imperial monetary history.

The production of the Julio-Claudian dynasty is well represented in all metals and denominations minted, with the exception of the gold issues. In order to find a beautiful gold aureus we have to proceed to the Flavian dynasty, when we can note an aureus of Domitian. The other metals minted by this dynasty are also well represented. In its coins, the return towards the hard lines of the portraits, following the prototypes of the late Republic, can be seen.

Of the Antonine dynasty a great representation exists, because these emperors undertook a great deal of minting activity and some of them were in power a sufficient time to strike a remarkable volume of issues. The progressive increase in the level of prices in the Roman period was the reason why the sestertius was the denomination most coined and used; for that reason this denomination is numerous in the collection.

The Roman monetary system continued almost without change during the following dynasty, the Severan. An aureus of Plautilla, the wife of Caracalla,



Fig. 3. Roman Imperial Aureus. Plautilla (under Caracalla). A.D. 202

is exceptionally preserved (fig. 3). From these years the collection has an abundant number of antoniniani and sestertii, minted in the name of the emperors and their family, spouses and mothers. A part of these antoniniani and others struck later entered the collection of the Laboratory of Archaeology from a hoard, which does not have documentary references.

The debasement of the antoniniani, its abundance, and the little value of the billon coinages are the reasons for the huge number of them in the collection. The pieces of Gallienus and Claudius II, many of them irregular issues, are very well represented. On the contrary, the coinages of the first years of the Diocletian reform, struck in the name of the Tetrarchs, are limited, as there were few in circulation along the Iberian coastal strip. The IVth century is, without a doubt, the century from which most have survived, a result of the enormous amount minted in order to face the increasing necessities of the state finances. During the IVth century, the gold coin par excellence was the solidus, minted from the reign of Constantine I.

The Iberian coinages and those struck in the Roman cities of Hispania during the Julio-Claudian dynasty are abundant, as expected, since the collection has been nourished by donations, which to a certain extent reflects the pieces that can be easily obtained, as is the case of the coins issued in the Iberian cities of Arse or Saitabi, or in the Roman cities of Saguntum and Ilici, which circulated in great numbers in the Valencian area. In addition the evolution of the production of other peninsular mints can be followed, especially those of the Ebro valley and the east part of Andalusia, such as Castulo and Obulco.

With regards to the Visigoth issues, the collection preserves just a single piece, but it is an exceptional one, because it is a unicum, a triens coined in Valencia (fig. 4). According to tradition the coin was found on the site of the University.



Fig. 4. Triens de Suinthila. Valencia. A.D. 621–631

The collection of Islamic coins is important, as much with regard to its size, more than 500 pieces, as to its quality. It contains coins of all metals, all denominations and all periods (fig. 5). It is certain that a part of them comes from several hoards, but at the present time only two of these can be identified, one containing dinars of the Almoravid period and another fractions (1/8th) of the quirat, Almoravid as well. For its rarity and historical interest we highlight the existence of a dinar of Alí ben Yusuf, struck in Denia.



Fig. 5. Dinar. Alí ben Yusuf. Seville. 518 H.

The medieval coinages from the Christian kingdoms are not very abundant, which, to a certain extent, is strange due to the proximity of the period and because they are not particularly rare. So, contrary to what one would think, the Valencian medieval coin collection is quite small. Even so, the University holds more than 200 pieces covering a good part of the production in the



Fig. 6. 50 reales. Felipe IV. Segovia. A.D. 1631

territories controlled by the Castilla-Leon and Aragón crowns. As may be expected the billon issues (*dineros*, *blancas* and *cuartillos*) are abundant, the silver reales or croats rarer, and the gold practically non-existent.

More numerous are the issues struck in modern times. In the Departament de Prehistòria i Arqueologia there are more than 400 pieces, and many more are kept in the Library. The gold is scant, but the other metals are well represented. One can note a good number of reales, medios reales, blancas and maravedís minted by the Catholic Monarchs; the issues of the Austrian dynasty kept in the collection are no less interesting, with pieces struck in America and Spain; among them we can draw attention to a *splendid cincuentín* (fifty reales) issued in Segovia (fig. 6). The Modern Valencian coinages are better represented than those from the Medieval period, although they do not reach the level that one should expect, because leaving aside an escudo issued in the name of Carlos II, the rest of the specimens are composed of reales (also called *dihuitens* due to their value: 18 *diners*) and *diners* (also known as *reals menuts* of Valencia). The latter are particularly scarce, in spite of the little value and the huge amount struck and their wide circulation. Of the Bourbon dynasty the collection houses a large number of copper pieces, especially the 2 maravedís of Fernando VII, and although the silver is not very abundant one can see pieces of all the denominations, some of them in very good condition (fig. 7).

The collection preserves, in addition, a large and varied group of foreign coinages minted from the XVI century to the present time. Most of them entered the collection, according to the documents, by sporadic gifts and without the intention to form or complete any series.



Fig. 7. 30 sous. Fernando VII. Palma de Mallorca. A.D. 1808

From the information given in this short article, it can be deduced that the coin cabinet of the University had an ancient origin and that it has been and continues to be important. Although in size it is not comparable with the greater coin cabinets in Spain, such as Madrid or Barcelona, the University of València is proud to possess one of the most important.

With regards to the origin of the University collection, regrettably, the documentation that we have concerning its evolution and its progressive expansion is very scarce. As far as we know, the University has never had a policy of coin and medal purchases. However, the documentation on donations from private collections is substantial, and some, based on the history of the donors, may have contained pieces acquired in Italy. It is also certain that some gifts consisted of hoards found in the Valencian area, for example that of the Roman denarii found in Lliria, that of antoniniani deduced by Mateu y Llopis or that of Almoravid dinars.